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Hipparchus, the Greek astronomer, catalogued the celestial bodies that are observable with the naked eye 2,100 years ago

ALAMY

HISTORY

## Hipparchus's lost map found by star pupil

[Jack Blackburn](#), History Correspondent

Thursday October 27 2022, 12.00am BST, The Times

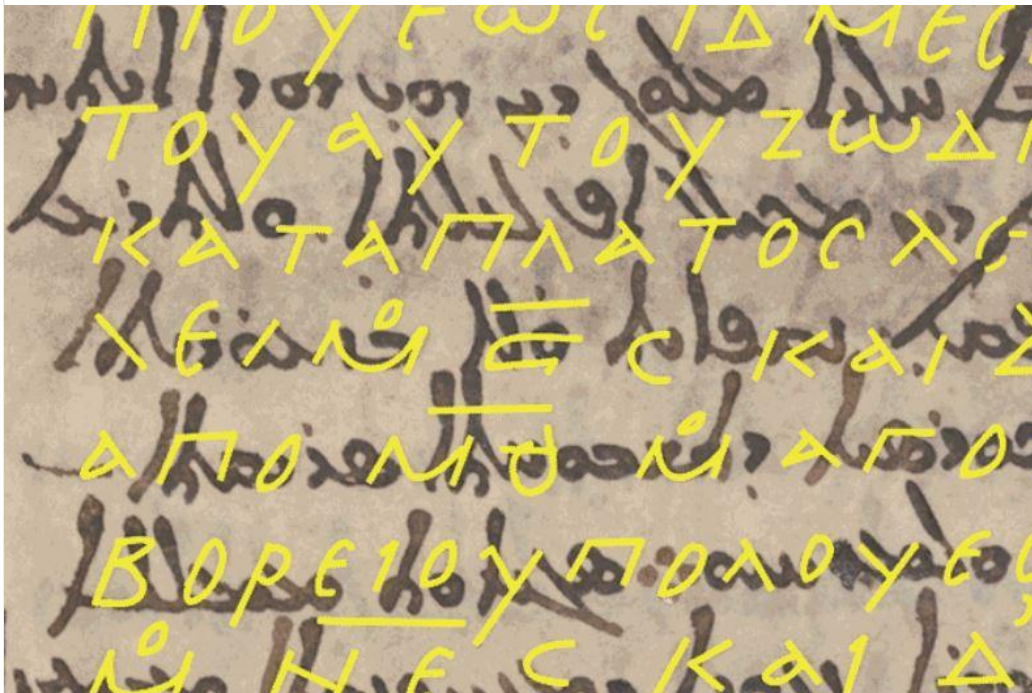
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A map of the stars, the oldest astronomical text known to mankind, appears to have been found by a student working on a

summer project.

Jamie Klair was looking at a piece of medieval recycled manuscript when he spotted a passage written in Greek and brought it to his teacher's attention.

Dr Peter Williams, a biblical historian from the University of Cambridge, carried out further research and discovered that it was a fragment from the 2,100-year-old catalogue of the stars by the Greek astronomer Hipparchus, a much noted chart of celestial bodies which was thought to be lost to the ages.



Jamie Klair discovered that it was a fragment from the ancient catalogue of the stars while working on a summer project  
MUSEUM OF THE BIBLE

“Hipparchus’s lost *Star Catalogue* is famous in the history of science as the earliest known attempt to record accurate co-ordinates of many celestial objects observable with the naked eye,” the paper, published in the *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, said.

“This new evidence is the most authoritative to date and allows major progress in the reconstruction of Hipparchus’s *Star*

*Catalogue,”* the research said.

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The discovery happened by chance ten years ago when Williams set his students the summer task of studying the *Codex Climaci Rescriptus*, a collection of Christian texts originally from Saint Catherine’s Monastery in Egypt.

However, the manuscript is a palimpsest, which is a document where previous texts on it have been erased to allow reuse. It was this which caught the student’s eye.

“Klair, then an undergraduate student at the University of Cambridge, first noticed the astronomical nature of the undertext on some folios in 2012,” the journal said.

Multispectral imaging was used to analyse the document and, while studying this analysis, Williams noticed the presence of astronomical measurements last year.

It is now believed that the extract was originally written by Hipparchus. The co-ordinates given for the Corona Borealis constellation would place the time of observation at 129BC, the period when Hipparchus is thought to have worked.

The fragment has enlightened our understanding of ancient astronomy, which appears to have been a remarkably accurate discipline.

Hipparchus's measurements were correct to within one degree of the stars' actual positions.

Some 300 years later, the Greek mathematician and astronomer Ptolemy wrote his *Almagest*, the oldest star catalogue known to historians before this discovery.

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Ptolemy drew on Hipparchus and other sources but, regardless of his work, Ptolemy's measurements are now described as "significantly" less accurate than those of his predecessor.

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